

A partly successful attempt at rearing *Dahlica inconspicuella* (Stt.) (Lep.: Psychidae)

Following an unsuccessful attempt at rearing the bagworm moth *Dahlica inconspicuella* during 2001/2 (*Ent. Rec.* **114**: 141-143), during which all larvae were lost either during their third instar due to starvation, or while overwintering due to desiccation or mould, a second attempt at rearing this species was undertaken in 2002/3. As reported previously, the late Dennis O’Keeffe sent me some pupal cases from the Dungeness site in February 2002. By 7 March, 20 adults (seven males and fourteen females) had hatched, and these produced larvae later that month. This second batch of larvae were initially reared as before, i.e. indoors in boxes containing a layer of *John Innes* Potting Compost. They were fed the same sort of diet as before, i.e. fresh dead insects to instar three, but this time the lichen *Xanthoria parietina* was provided at this point and most went on to feed on this successfully. As previously, they were also given periodic light sprays with water to prevent desiccation.

This time, larval survival was good, with about 300 (75%) making it through their third instar and the dietary transition that occurs at this point in their life cycle. This was one point where high losses occurred during my original rearing of this species in 2001. Unfortunately, then it took some time to appreciate this change in dietary requirement had occurred and many larvae starved in the meantime.

Having made this transition successfully about 260 (65%) survived to their final (fifth) instar. They began to ascend the walls of their culture vessels at the end of August and I was hopeful that significant numbers could be successfully reared the following spring as I had an alternative plan for overwintering them.

Perhaps the most critical period for losses during the original rearing was the overwintering of full-grown larvae. Last time this was attempted by keeping the larvae indoors in an unheated room. For this, they were left in their culture vessels where they had loosely fixed their cases to the lids, and sprayed periodically. Using this method, losses were total, with desiccation and mould being the chief problems encountered. For this reason, and following advice from Uwe Widowski, who had had some success rearing larvae from the original batch I sent him in November 2001, I adopted a different approach to overwintering these larvae. In the past I have had some success overwintering single-brooded Nepticulidae by placing autumnal mines in earthenware flower-pots containing a layer of *John Innes* Potting Compost and sphagnum moss. These pots are then covered with a sheet of polythene and sunk to their shoulders in the garden (*Ent. Rec.* **110**, 251-252). If these are left undisturbed over the winter and brought indoors at various times during the spring/early summer, adults emerge with variable success rates. This was the method I adopted for overwintering my second batch of *D. inconspicuella* larvae. On 25 October I placed two large flower-pots, each containing about 130 larvae, in a recently dug border under an east facing fence. The pots were covered with clear polythene sheet tightly tied with string. Clear polythene was used as it enables periodic inspection of the pot contents during the winter months without disturbance. The pots also contained bark

with growths of *X. parietina* as food for the larvae, and some old roofing felt to provide them with cover and a substrate to fix their cases under.

On 14 February 2003 the flower-pots were lifted and about 150 (80 and 71) live (mobile) larvae removed, placed in culture vessels and brought indoors for pupation and emergence. Success I thought. However, from these only three males and two females emerged, the males between 4 and 6 March and the females between 9 and 13 March. The remaining cases were opened on 22 March and their contents found to have died before or after pupation. This was apparently due to desiccation, despite periodic water spraying during this period. I suspect that they were brought indoors too early, as they were still perambulating and had not fixed their cases for pupation.

It appears that that this species, and I suspect *D. lichenella*, is very sensitive to humidity. Uwe has also come to the same conclusion and says that members of this genus are notoriously hard to culture. Consequently, if attempting to rear this psychid I would suggest using large flower-pots for overwintering larvae, in an attempt to provide a range of micro-climates. Also, avoid excessive moisture by ensuring the ground used for sinking the flower-pots is well drained and leave the pots *in-situ* until at least the end of February or the middle of March. Just goes to show that you shouldn't count your bagmoths before their hatched.— IAN SIMS, 2 The Delph, Lower Earley, Reading, Berkshire, RG6 3AN. (E-mail: Sims@wrcplc.co.uk)

***Pyrausta aurata* (Scop.) (Lep.: Pyralidae) in Staffordshire**

The pyralid *Pyrausta aurata* has always been a locally uncommon moth in Staffordshire, and is patchily distributed in the rest of England, Wales, southern Scotland to the Inner Hebrides and in the Channel Islands (Goater, 1986. *British Pyralid Moths*). The larvae are associated with *Mentha*, *Calamintha*, *Salvia* and *Origanum vulgare*. There are very few Staffordshire records of the moth. The earliest are from Dovedale (H. W. Daltry, given in the *Victoria County History*) and then later there are records from the Manifold Valley by the late Richard Warren who noted it (1988. *The smaller moths of Staffordshire*) as more common on the limestone than elsewhere in the county. Subsequent records are from gardens, at light traps – one at Springfields in 1977 (R. G. Warren and D. W. Emley), one at Stone in 2000 (D. W. Emley) and one at Acton Trussel in 2000 (S. Phipps). Subsequently, one landed on the head of my friend R. H. Heath in his garden at Meir, at around midnight on the warm, humid night of 14 August 2002. I quickly boxed it for examination. Mr Heath grows cultivated mint in his garden, but there is also some Water Mint *Mentha aquatica*, which originated at the River Blythe, and may be the source? This small pyralid moth is possibly rather more widespread in Staffordshire than the records suggest.

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